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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [SNAR](#) [ETRD](#) [BEXP](#) [MASS](#) [ECOWAS](#) [WCAR](#) [XF](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: BREAKFAST WITH PRESIDENT OBASANJO

REF: A. STATE 122773

[B](#). ABUJA 1547

[C](#). ABUJA 2074

[D](#). ABUJA 2072

[E](#). STATE 143583

[F](#). STATE 146201

(U) Classified by Ambassador Howard F. Jeter; Reasons 1.6X5, 1.6X6, 1.6X8.

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SUMMARY
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[1](#)1. (S/NF) SUMMARY: Ambassador Jeter and President Obasanjo discussed a smorgasbord of issues over a lengthy breakfast on August 24. The President said he would do everything possible to meet the counter-narcotics benchmarks, but he admitted that the Nigerian judiciary was broken and offered to render additional suspects to the U.S. if it would mean Nigeria's certification. He confirmed that 250 million Naira had been set aside for the NDLEA in the supplemental budget. During the breakfast, Obasanjo called the Acting Minister of Defense and demanded results on security assistance. He agreed to the UNAMSIL troop rotation schedule requested by the U.S. Obasanjo offered cautious assent to training for the four Guinean companies, but warned against actions that would threaten Qadhafi in the sub-region. The President said that Nigeria would remain neutral on the replacement of the ECOWAS Executive Secretary, but strongly implied support for the Ghanaian candidate. Finally, Obasanjo commented on his plans for the WCAR, and gave his personal and private insights into the Middle East conflict. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Ambassador Jeter was accompanied to the meeting by his Staff Assistant (notetaker). Ahmed Jodu, the Chairman of the Nigerian Communications Commission and Adobe Obe, the President's Special Assistant (and an influential advisor) also attended the working breakfast. In the last few minutes, Magnus Kpakol, the new Chief Economic Advisor to the President (and a twenty-year Dallas resident) joined the early morning gathering.

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COUNTER-NARCOTICS AND LAW ENFORCEMENT
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[1](#)3. (C) Ambassador Jeter emphasized that there existed a perception that Nigeria was off-track on meeting counter-narcotics benchmarks (Ref C), and passed the President the non-paper relayed in Ref A. The Ambassador explained that the certification process was an annual event, and that Nigeria would have to do more. Drugs had been discovered on the South Africa Airways/Nigerian Airways flight to New York, the NDLEA-DEA joint taskforce was moribund, and while the President had agreed to double the NDLEA budget, the Embassy had seen no evidence that NDLEA had received additional resources. Moreover, Nigeria had not even bothered to answer the FATF survey. Finally, no progress had been made towards extradition of wanted fugitives. Ambassador Jeter emphasized that we all knew who these people were, and that they were making huge amounts of money, damaging Nigeria's image and harming Americans.

[1](#)4. (C) In response, President Obasanjo said, "I gave more money to NDLEA," and picked up his phone and called his Principal Secretary, Stephen Oronsaye. Confirming that 250 million Naira had been put in the supplemental budget, the President turned to the Ambassador and said he would speak to the Minister of Finance to make sure the money was released to NDLEA quickly. Turning to the SAA/NA flight, the President thanked the Ambassador for forwarding details on one of the drug traffickers captured at JFK. He stated that, armed with that information, he had demanded a full accounting of those on duty at that time at MMIA (the Lagos international airport).

15. (S/NF) Turning to the subject of extradition, Obasanjo said, "Howard, we will do everything we can that you ask on counter-narcotics, but I have to be honest with you." The President then went on to explain that he did not think the extradition process could be fixed. Recognizing the realities of a moribund judicial system, unresponsive and rife with corruption, Obasanjo referred to the renditions ("what we did last year") and offered, "If we need to do that again to be certified, we will do it." Extending his hands in the air to thank the Almighty, he remarked, "We got off lightly last time." Ambassador Jeter thanked the President for his willingness to cooperate, and said he would pass the offer of renditions to Washington, but emphasized that the U.S. wanted to see Nigeria extradite fugitives through a judicial process with respect for the rule of law and the civil rights of the individuals concerned. We were worried about human rights.

16. (S/NF) The President said he would speak to the Minister of State for Justice, a "good man," to see if he could recharge the effort for a working extradition process. He also noted that Mohammed Belgore, Chief Judge of the Federal High Court, and, "one of the most corrupt people in Nigeria," had retired. Justice Jinadu would cover the post for several weeks, and then would retire and be replaced by a new Chief Judge, who might be more willing to establish an extradition court. (NOTE: The President did not say who the new Chief Judge would be, but said he expected a woman to be selected. END NOTE.) However, the United States would have to recognize the realities he faced on this issue, the President emphasized, reminding the Ambassador that he was subject to a constitutional separation of powers and could not inject himself into the running of the courts.

17. (C) The Ambassador asked the President how he planned to recruit 40,000 police a year and make sure they had the training needed to be effective. This was a concern for us because we recognized that Nigeria had neither the trainers nor facilities to adequately prepare such large numbers for effective policing. The President reminded the Ambassador that he had recently turned over some empty military barracks to the police. However, he urged Nigeria needed U.S. help, and asked the Ambassador about police training. "We need train-the-trainer and training aids for our institutions, and thought you were going to help us with this," he said. Ambassador Jeter stated he hoped to have an answer soon on the police reform program and what U.S. assistance might be forthcoming.

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MILITARY MATTERS
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18. (C) Security Assistance: Ambassador Jeter provided the President an update on the work of the Embassy with the Acting Minister of Defense (Army Minister Lawal Batagarawa) on the Embassy's security assistance program. There had been real problems with the Ministry of Defense's Legal Director demanding changes to the text of LOA's that we could not legally change, and some communications issues, the sum of which had stalled progress on completing the assistance. Batagarawa had helped make significant progress, the Ambassador said. The President, assuming this was a veiled criticism of Minister of Defense Danjuma, explained that the one great tragedy of his Presidency had been the illness of Danjuma. Danjuma, the President said, when he was not sick, was "the best," and "top notch."

19. (C) Ambassador Jeter clarified, explaining that he had not meant to say anything negative about Danjuma, only that, during Minister Danjuma's absence, Batagarawa had been working with the Embassy on this issue and had been very, very helpful. The President, smiling, immediately picked up the phone and called Batagarawa, we thought to compliment him. Instead, however, he demanded an update and to know why there was a problem. "Ah! What are you doing? They are giving us this equipment! Who is the problem? Tell her I said to sign the papers!" (COMMENT: Later that day, Ambassador Jeter called Batagarawa to explain that he had complimented him to the President, and had not tried to go above his head. Batagarawa thanked the Ambassador, and said that even if the Ambassador had gone to the President, it would have been okay, because now he had the word of the President as ammunition to fix the security assistance problem in the Ministry. END COMMENT.)

110. (C) OFR ROTATIONS: The Ambassador asked the President if he would be willing to adjust the schedules of the Nigerian battalions in Sierra Leone due to rotate out in September, retaining one battalion until January (Ref E). The President replied that he would have them both remain until January if

that was what the U.S. wanted. Ambassador Jeter explained that if one rotated out in September and one in January, the latter battalion could rotate out with two others due to rotate in January, and all three could be replaced by the three OFR phase III battalions. That way, the three OFR battalions could use their new skills and equipment immediately without risk of those skills diminishing. The President willingly agreed, and said he would so inform the Chief of Army Staff.

11. (C) TRAINING OF GUINEAN ARMY COMPANIES: Ambassador Jeter told the President of the plans to train four Guinean Army companies (Ref F). The President immediately reacted strongly, urging the U.S. to "be careful." He described President Conte as "just as stubborn" as President Taylor. Too much power in Conte's hands could cause Qadhafi to perceive a threat to his client states in the sub-region. The President remarked that Qadhafi had "one-thousand aircraft and one-thousand tanks at his disposal." If he attacked Nigeria, Obasanjo blustered, "I would stop his tanks and bring down his aircraft with anti-aircraft guns." However, if Qadhafi attacked Guinea or another state in the sub-region, Nigeria would not come to their defense. Moreover, Obasanjo believed, too much power in Conte's hands was a risk to Liberia, and a vacuum in Liberia would invite Qadhafi's meddling. Ambassador Jeter explained that training the four companies was modest, would include intensive human rights training, require guarantees that the training could only be used for self-defense, and a commitment the companies could only cross borders in hot-pursuit. We were helping Guinea because we wanted the country to be able to defend itself. Obasanjo said that was fine, but reiterated his warning to "be careful." (NOTE: Later, Ambassador Jeter informed the Acting Minister of Defense about the training. Batagarawa said that the effort was useful, and thanked the U.S. for its help. END NOTE).

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WCAR AND THE MIDDLE EAST
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12. (C) Ambassador Jeter thanked the President for his efforts to make the WCAR forward-looking, particularly in regards to reparations and slavery. Obasanjo said he would attend the conference, and would speak publicly on those issues, but would not take a position on the Middle East conflict. The conflict was "too complicated," the President opined. He then asked if Secretary of State Powell would attend the WCAR. Ambassador Jeter informed the President that a decision whether the U.S. would attend, and who would lead the delegation, had not yet been made. Obasanjo began to say he would like to ask Secretary Powell to be there; however, he then said he would not ask, because the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and how it would be handled in the WCAR, remained unresolved. He recognized that this was a serious problem for the U.S.

13. (C) President Obasanjo then shared some of his views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Asserting that he would not say this publicly, the President believed that Arafat had made "a huge mistake" by refusing to reach agreement at Camp David. He never expected the Israelis to offer as much as they did, and all that stood between that offer and Arafat's demands were certain "small details" relating to Jerusalem. Arafat should have accepted the deal, Obasanjo declared, while insisting that discussions continue on unresolved matters. He then compared Arafat's "mistake" to that of Saddam Hussein in opposing the U.S. in the Gulf. The President remarked that, had he been in Hussein's shoes on January 14, 1991, he would have used the eight-hour time difference between Baghdad and Washington to hold a victory rally. Once having claimed victory over the U.S., he would have withdrawn his forces, still within the eight-hour window.

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U.S. INVESTMENT
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14. (C) The President asked the Ambassador why so few American companies were investing in Nigeria. The Ambassador explained that many American companies saw too much risk, and did not see enough transparency. The Ambassador referred to the National Identity Card tendering process, where Polaroid felt that they, as a part of the Chams, had been unfairly passed over for SAGEM, the French consortium. Obasanjo remarked that both he and Ambassador Jeter had been at the meeting with all of the bidders, and emphasized that no one company from the Chams consortium had answered his question of who would ultimately be responsible for the entire project. The President further commented that American

companies did not need to partner with a Nigerian company in order to win public contracts. That may have been true under previous Administrations, he stated, but was not now true. Ambassador Jeter urged the President to share these views with the Watts CODEL the following week, to which the President agreed.

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THE RACE FOR ECOWAS EXECUTIVE SECRETARY
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15. (C) Ambassador Jeter asked who Nigeria favored to replace Lansana Kouyate as ECOWAS Executive Secretary, emphasizing the need for strong leadership of the regional Secretariat. We wanted to help ECOWAS in a way we had not before, and strong ECOWAS leadership would determine what we would be able to do. Obasanjo noted that there were three candidates in the race. He suggested quiet, behind-the-scenes support for Ghana's Chambas, but promised public silence until consensus emerged. (COMMENT: After the meeting, Ambassador Jeter discussed this point further with Adobe Obe. Adobe indicated that Nigeria wanted to be careful not to appear as pre-determining the process by throwing it weight behind one candidate. Adobe calculated that besides Benin and the Gambia -- with their own candidates -- only Senegal and Cote d'Ivoire were likely to pull against Chambas as a consensus candidate. Adobe opined that some Francophone countries were focusing on UEMOA at the expense of ECOWAS, and Nigeria was loathe to give them ammunition by pushing hard for Chambas. He also observed that France could help keep the Francophone countries engaged with ECOWAS. END COMMENT.)

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COMMENT
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16. (C) During the nearly two-hour encounter, Obasanjo was relaxed, happy, engaged, even bubbly. Obasanjo's comments on the role of Libya in the sub-region and the situation in the Middle East were revealing.

17. (C) Peppering the meal were phone calls out to Ministers and government officials to confirm certain facts, and phone calls in from Governors. The Governor of Ebonyi called about a fatal security incident involving the Mobile Police; the Governor of Plateau called to talk about a road desired by Deputy Senate President Mantu. In each case, the President urged the Governors to use their own authority and resources before asking for Presidential intervention. Obasanjo seems to be completely willing to defer Presidential decisions on issues involving the states, and to push the governors to exercise their own authority.

18. (C) On the Federal level, however, President Obasanjo has a tight grip on decision-making, and seems to delegate very little authority to his Ministers. As a result, we rarely see a Minister make a decision without first consulting the President. Unfortunately, this system places a huge burden on the President himself, while engendering gridlock in the bureaucratic process. The Embassy's access to the President, on critical matters is therefore extremely important, and casual encounters often seem to be the most productive. However, this access cannot be abused, and we are careful not to turn every social event into a business meeting.

19. (C) On counter-narcotics, we will now wait and see what impact this and other recent high-level approaches have on the GON's efforts in this area. However, we are now sure that some additional NDLEA resources will be forthcoming, and are hopeful this will have an impact on the NDLEA's ability to move closer to its ambitious vision.

20. (U) Freetown minimize considered.
Jeter